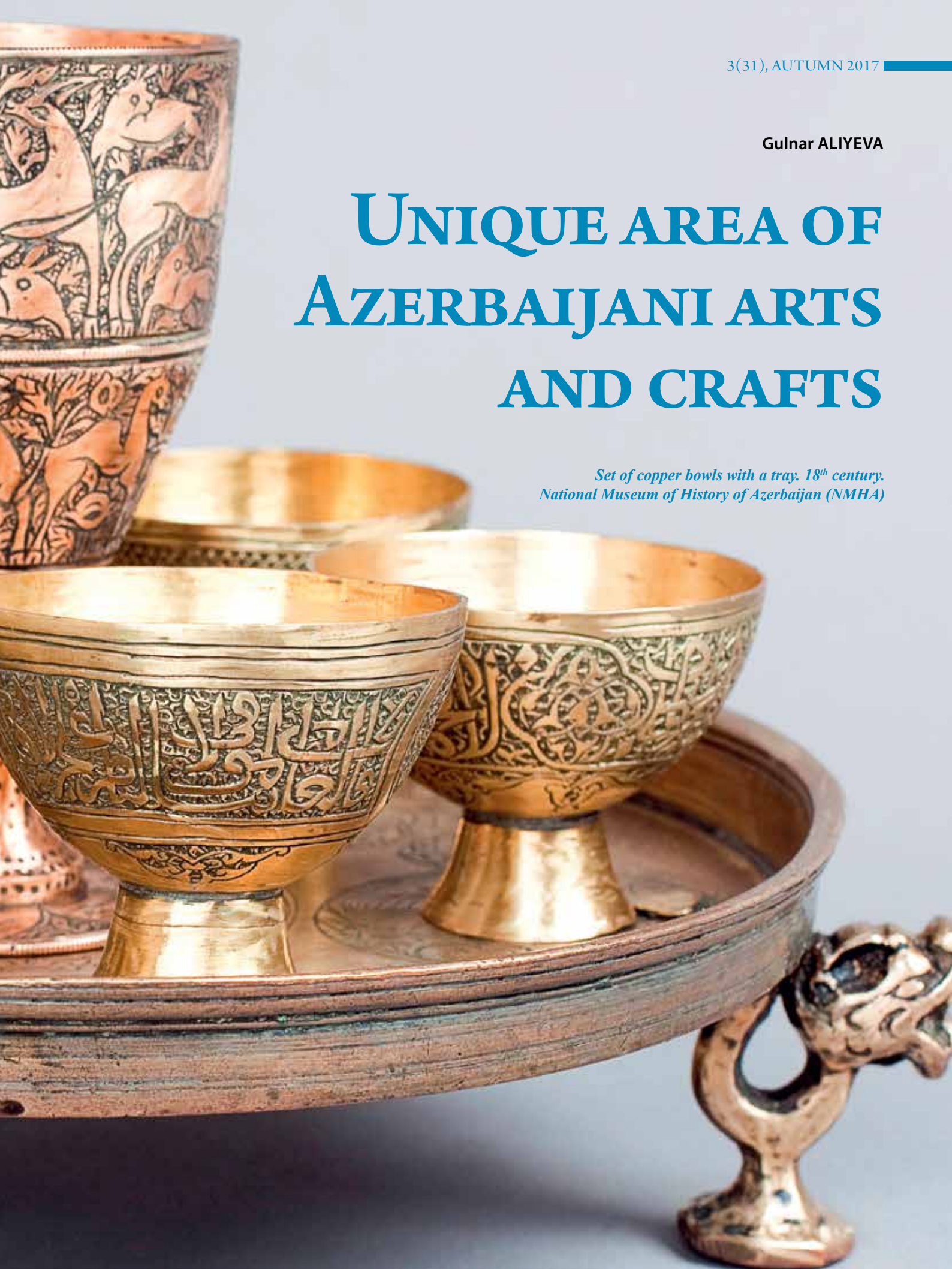


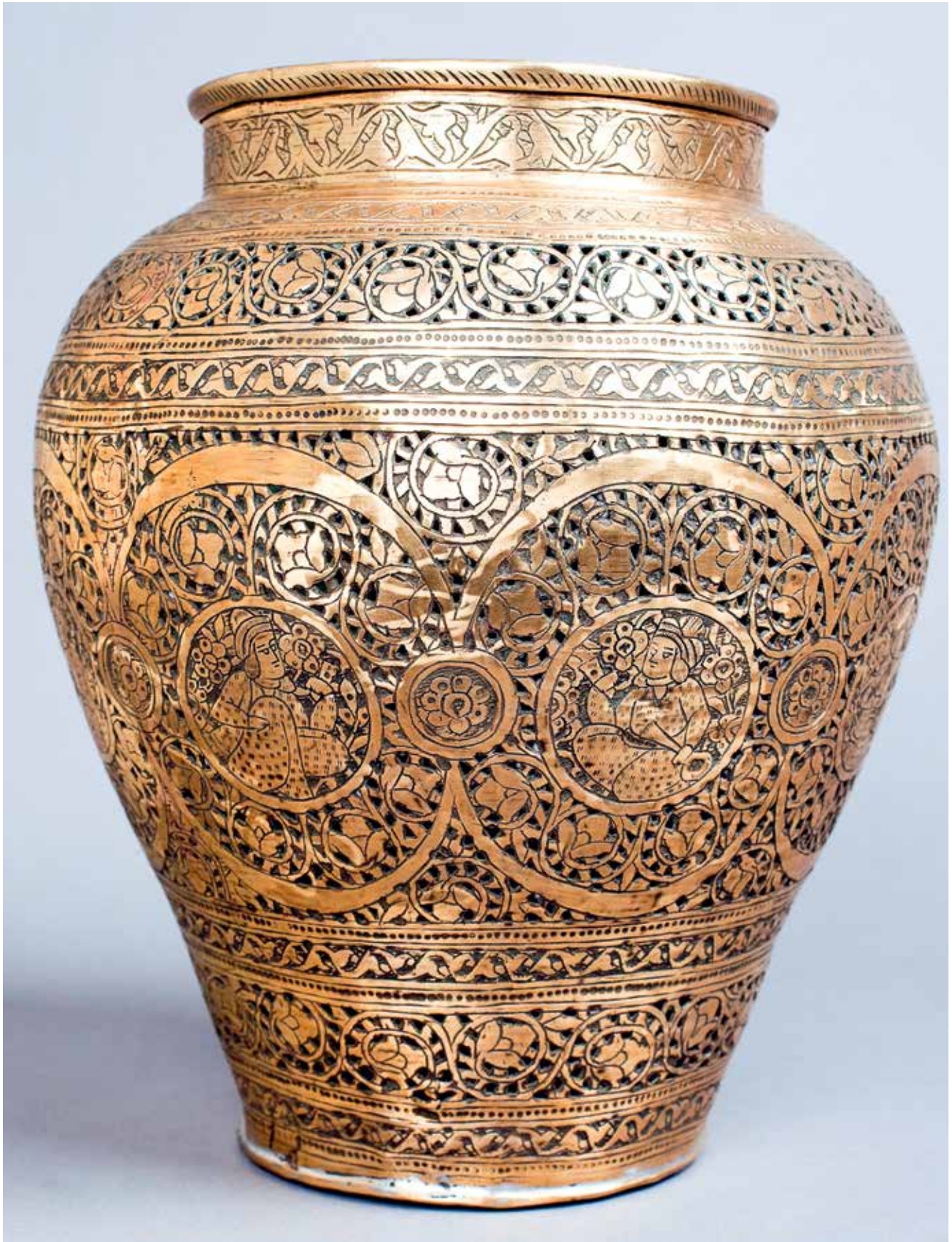


Gulnar ALIYEVA

UNIQUE AREA OF AZERBAIJANI ARTS AND CRAFTS

*Set of copper bowls with a tray. 18th century.
National Museum of History of Azerbaijan (NMHA)*





In medieval Azerbaijan, the art of artistic relief processing of metal was widespread. It is an ancient kind of decorative and applied art, second only to art ceramics. However, by the thematic abundance of motives and variety of artistic and technical means and techniques, it surpasses other artistic handicrafts.

At first, the development of this craft was dominated by products made of bronze and brass and later - of silver and gold. Approximately from the 9th-11th centuries in Azerbaijan, as in the whole of the Middle East, the main products of artisans were products made of copper and its alloys. In medieval decorative patterns, the secular theme - scenes of feasts, martial arts, hunting exploits, as well as religious subjects in the form of various deities and fantastic creatures became popular. With the Islamization of Azerbaijan, there appeared a style that mentions the synthesis of the art tradition of various peoples that were part of the caliphate. Copper and bronze products, which

replaced silver and gold products, became widespread, and the ornamentation and storyline triumphs in decoration. There is a change in the forms of products - towards thinning.

Copperware in Azerbaijan was performed in different techniques - inlay, forging, filigree, blackening and engraving. The dishes were covered with ornamentation, which is subordinate to the shape of the product and clearly distinguishes its shape, while concentric circles, inside which the ornament is placed, enhance the impression of volume. There were variants of the ornament or its elements established for certain types of dishes. At first, these ornaments were very simple, in the form of sticks, dots or strokes, but then they became more complicated, and certain compositions, lyrical scenes, and images of people and animals appeared. A very important place was given to epigraphy, and excerpts from the works of Saadi Shirazi and Hafiz were used on products especially



Copper box. 19th century. NMHA

frequently. Obviously, these poems were accessible to the people, and they were well known and loved by both rich and simple people. As for Nizami, then, apparently, the language of his poetry is too complicated, which is why excerpts from his works are not found among the inscriptions on the dishes.

The inscriptions that covered the surface of the product corresponded to its purpose. For example, the collection of the National Art Museum of Azerbaijan has a bath chest (Inventory No. 2122), on the surface of which lines from Shirazi's poem "Gulistan" on the properties of the gilaba, a kind of clay used for washing the head, clothes and carpets, are engraved. The trunk, 30 cm high, in the form of a flattened figure eight, was intended for storing gold decorations that were used by local beauties when they went to the bath. The thing is that in those days in the East, women's baths functioned as a kind of assembly or

clubs, and it was in the bathhouse where women wore their best outfits and the most expensive jewelry; Mothers also came here to look for a bride for their sons. There is an interesting bronze candlestick with a height of 37 cm and of a peculiar, archaic form, which has a nine-pointed shape at the bottom and is shaped like a cylinder at the top. At the same time, the following inscription in Farsi in "nastaliq" script is engraved on the upper edge: "One night I could not sleep and I heard a moth tell a candle that I'm in love and I'm burning with love, I'm burning because I love, but why are you shedding tears, crying and melting."

Images on copper vessels are striking by the variety of subjects - lyrical scenes, recreation scenes, musical collections depicting musical instruments and battle scenes. Quite often there are scenes of feasts, which depict various musical instruments. From this point of view,



Brass candelabrum with a carved pattern and colored glass. 16-17th centuries. NMHA





Bronze mortar. 11-12th centuries. NMHA

an ornamental bronze jug with a wide body in the upper part and 39 cm in height is interesting. The neck of the jug is decorated with a ribbon-like inscription in Farsi - an excerpt from Hafiz's ghazal printed in Suls script: "Spring without a beautiful lady is not spring, spring without a feast and songs is not spring, spring without flowers, dances and trills of nightingales is not spring, flower beds and clearings without poppies are not spring, either." The richly ornamented surface of the vessel depicts male figures playing rare musical instruments – the gimro, rubab and safail, and they are enclosed in decorative frames. At the same time, details of clothes and musical instruments and objects of everyday life can be clearly seen on the images, so this vessel is also of interest in the ethnographic sense. In his book on the musical culture of the East, E. Kaempfer cites the names of 23 musical instruments, including the gimro - bells, zurna or surnay - flute, daira - percussion instrument, safail - rattle, zil - plates, as well as the rubab, ud and rud.

In 1989, at an international symposium in Samarkand, A. Javadov performed Azerbaijani melodies on a medieval pipe found by archaeologist F. Ibrahimov in Baku, on the territory of the ancient fortress Ichari Shahar in the cultural layer dating back to the 9th-13th centuries. The instrument was made of clay in the form of a bird figure. The places of the eyes are marked with holes, and there are holes on the right and left wings and under the breast and the tail. The specialist in the history and theory of musical instruments, B. Huseynli, showed on the basis of a study that the pipe produces high and low sounds, which makes a melodious tone and makes it possible to find mugam

roots. Similar objects in the form of birds were also found in Mingachevir and in Guba District of Azerbaijan. Such finds are of great interest for researchers of the history of Azerbaijani music.

For the performance of religious and other everyday ceremonies, there were various objects and ritual utensils, including the so-called girkh-achar-jam - a copper vessel, on the walls of which prayers were written to protect from evil spirits and dark forces and to bring health and well-being. This ritual vessel was used for wedding ablutions, at the birth of a child, during prayers for the return of health, etc. In the side part of the vessel, 40 small key plates with the names of Muslim saints carved into them were hung from a chain. Sometimes a disc was hung on this vessel, on which the calendar and tables of the movement of planets, sometimes with the signs of the zodiac, were engraved. This disc was intended for magical rites and fortune telling.

Among the copper products we should highlight the kazan – a cauldron belonging to the 16th century. The surface is covered with enamel, which is not so common in copper products. There is an interesting inscription in black letters on a bluish background, meaning: "Before you do something, think about its consequences." In the past, Azerbaijanis, like other peoples of the Middle East, used in their everyday life a variety of dishes made of copper, which can be seen in miniatures. In particular, we can mention the cone-shaped caps "sarpush" with a magnificent ornament, which was used to cover plates with pilaf so that it does not cool. In the museum's collection there are many sarpush lids of various decorative design. On one of these lids covered with ornamentation enclosed in curly frames, two beyts from Hafiz's ghazal are carved: "There is nothing eternal in our life that will remain as a memory after us," and further: "Lift the sarpush from the plate, let the beloved eat and enjoy the food. The sarpush and the plate (dovra) hugged each other, and sadness and sorrow were forgotten for some moments." During feasts, dinners, meetings, weddings or wakes, an indispensable attribute was the tray - "majmai", round and later square. On one of these trays exhibited in the museum, an instructive inscription is engraved with the following content: "O Allah, light our future, and keep the ungrateful child away from yourself. Thank Allah for the fact that your guest can taste different dishes from your table. For someone who is eternally grateful for the piece sent to him, the Lord will add twice, and whoever is always dissat-

Copper cauldron with enamel. 14-15th centuries. NMHA



ified will lose what he has. Everyone knows and approves of this. On this table, everything is plentiful, let the guest rush and get it." Accordingly, on one of the lamps, we see praise for the sun from the poem "Garden and Spring" by Amir Khosrov Dahlavi: "Let's give praise to the rising sun illuminating the sea and the sky, all nature, the hearts of those in love and everyone who woke up after sleep."

Wood carving is a favorite kind of arts and crafts in the East. It delights you with the variety and originality of forms and compositional decisions. Sorbet spoons with carved handles that look like a peacock's tail, caskets and polygonal and slotted tables "miz" are perfect. I would like to mention such a small Turkish table made of mahogany with an instructive inscription: "The well-being of a person depends on how much he can keep his mouth shut." The table is richly decorated with mother-of-pearl inlay and wood carvings.

Bright multicolored ceramics from Iran are very similar to Chinese ceramics by their ornaments and patterns, but the inscriptions in the Arabic "naskh" script indicate that these ceramics belongs to the Qajar era. The imitation of Chinese porcelain and ornaments is notable in them, which is a testimony to the high appreciation of Chinese dishes in other countries; In Europe, the secret of porcelain was not known yet at the time. It is necessary to note the large, richly ornamented sorbet dish kept in the museum. Such vessels were used during feasts, weddings and religious ceremonies; By the way, their images are often found on medieval Azerbaijani miniatures, reflecting scenes of everyday life. This sorbet dish is of interest in terms of orna-

mentation and inscriptions: its body is encircled by a wide band of ornament consisting of 15 ornamental elements of the buta lined up in a single direction. There are a number of different forms of the buta that symbolize flames and are more common in the carpets of the Baku group: badam-buta, hil-buta, kusulu-buta, bala-buta. Inside the element of the buta, there is an inscription in naskh script in Arabic with the names of the prophet Muhammad and his followers, as well as the phrase "May Yezid be damned", which was typical of the Shia Muslims, and the name of the owner - "Sahib Abdulali". On the surface of the vessel there is another inscription: "Without water, the sons and daughters of the prophet withered with thirst, a heart of stone would have melted too. The city of Rey, made by order of the ruler of Tabaristan."

And today museum visitors are struck by the art and the scrupulousness with which masters of past centuries created their masterpieces.

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Figure of a camel covered with a carved pattern. 15th century. NMHA